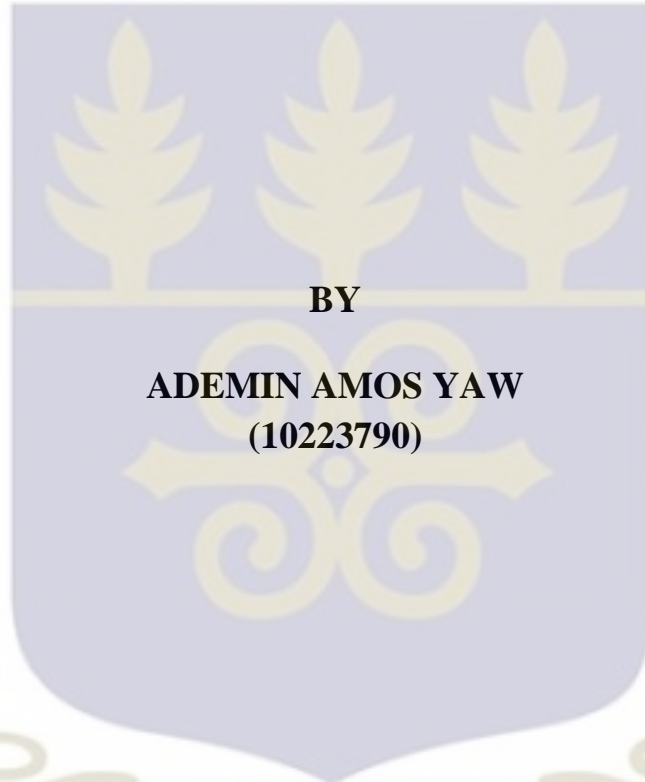


UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

**INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE TO SLAVERY
BY THE BUILSA PEOPLE OF NORTHERN GHANA**



BY

**ADEMIN AMOS YAW
(10223790)**

**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF
GHANA, LEGON IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF M.A.
DEGREE IN AFRICAN STUDIES.**

JULY, 2016

DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of a research undertaken by Ademin Amos Yaw in African Studies of the School of Research and Graduate Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, under the joint supervision of Dr. Ayesu Ebenezer and Dr. Ntewusu Samuel Aniegye both of the University of Ghana. This thesis has never been presented, either in part or in whole for a degree in any other university.

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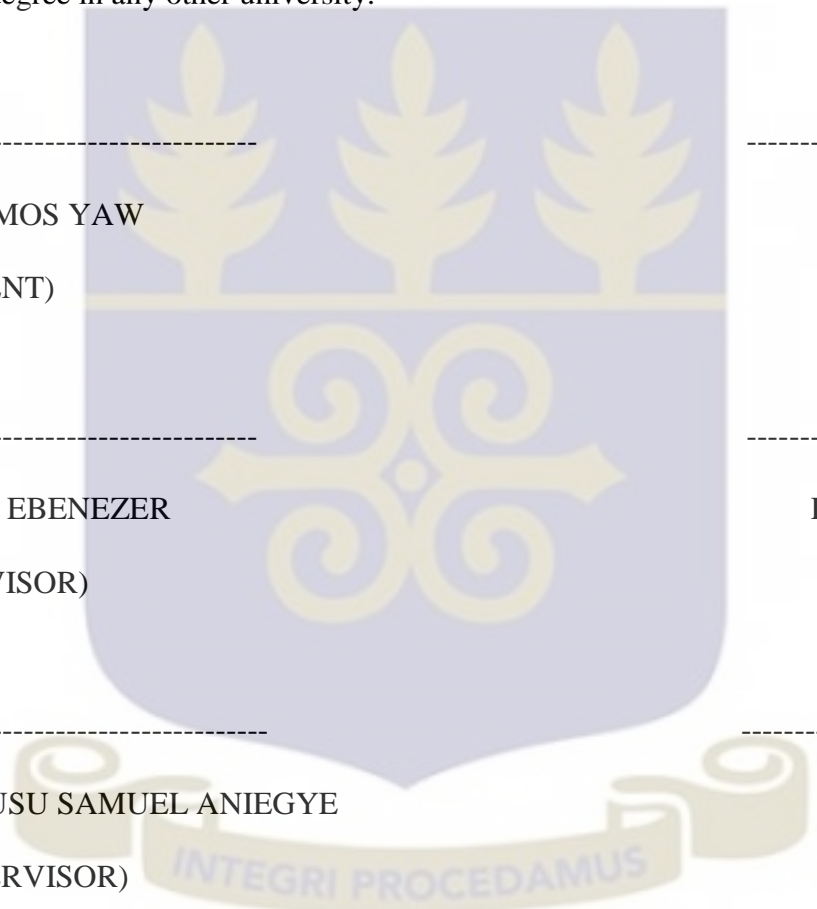
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DATE



DEDICATION

God, may your mighty name be praised forever: and to my wife Martha Mohieadey and son Asuinura Ademin Jesse and my friend Dennis Boamah Boateng.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

May the Great God of life be praised for giving the strength and protection and making it possible for me to come out with this thesis successfully.

Secondly, I am so grateful to my supervisory team, Dr. Ayesu Ebenezer and Dr. Ntewusu Samuel Aniegye for their useful suggestions, corrections, guidance and support without which this thesis would have remained a dream.

I am also very grateful to Prof. Monica Tetzlaff for pictures and Ademin Banabas Azetum for assisting during the field work.

My special thanks to Teitey Amos, Adu Asare Frank and Asadoma of Anankumyeri for their various contributions and support.

Finally to my family, I say thank you so much.



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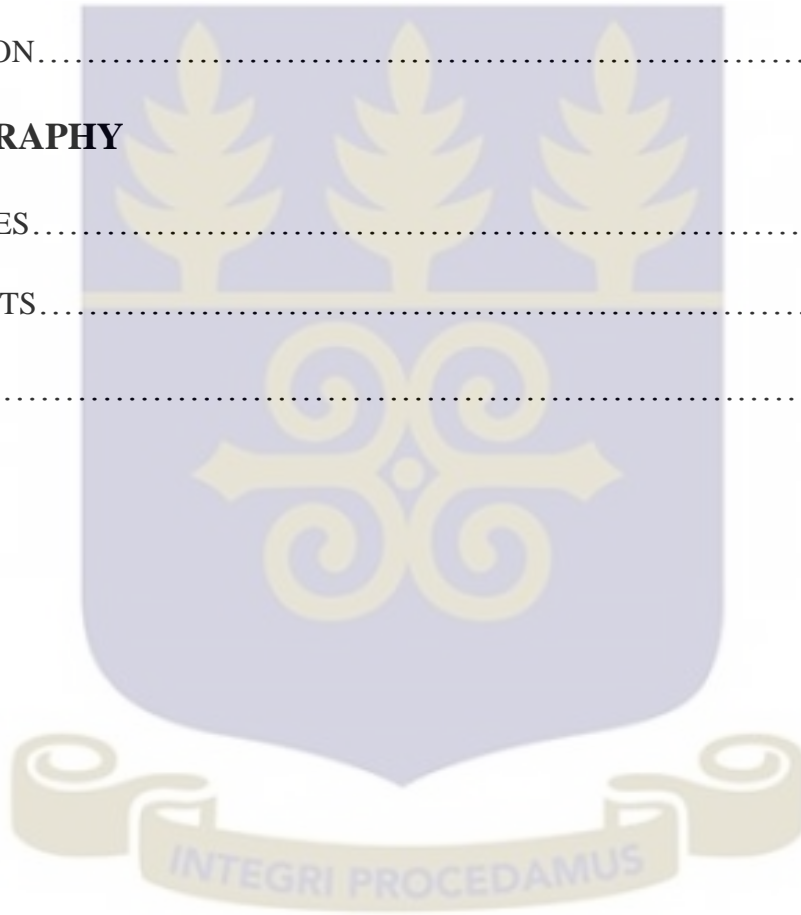
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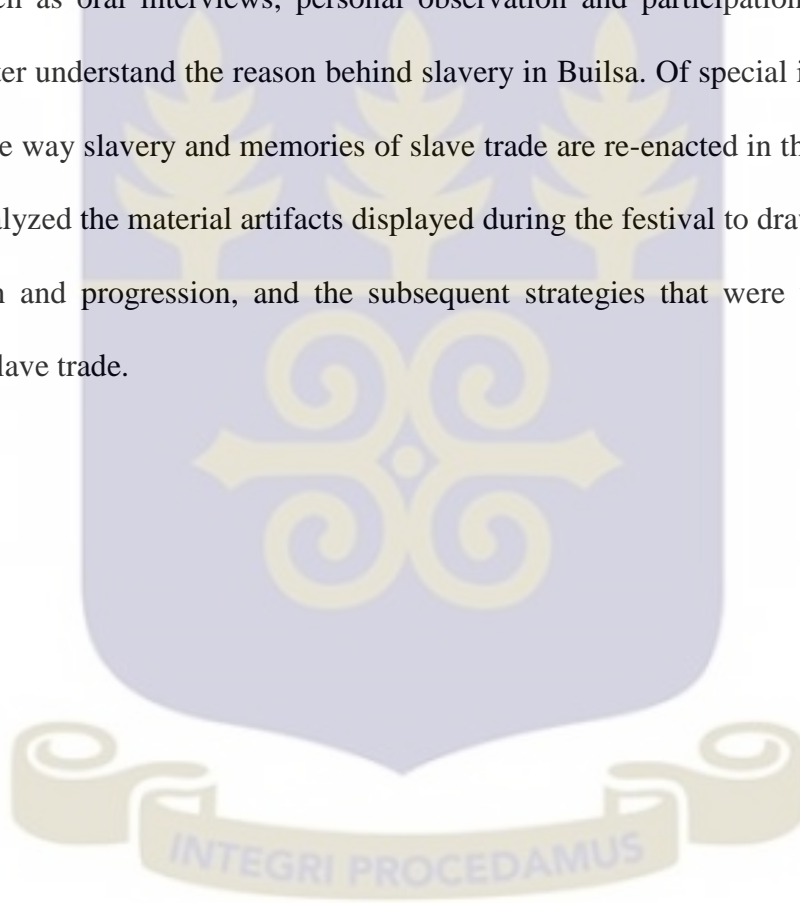


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ABSTRACT

There is enough historical evidence to show that the northern part of Ghana was affected by slavery in many ways. My thesis discusses slavery in Builsa territory located in the present day Upper East Region of Ghana. I pursued the studies using a number of strategies such as oral interviews, personal observation and participation and archival search to better understand the reason behind slavery in Builsa. Of special interest in this research is the way slavery and memories of slave trade are re-enacted in the yearly Feok festival. I analyzed the material artifacts displayed during the festival to draw conclusions on the origin and progression, and the subsequent strategies that were used to resist slavery and slave trade.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Orlando indicates that the story of slavery touches on almost every society in the world. Both Europeans and Africans engaged in the trade; however, history has recorded several resistances on the part of the Africans who took measures to protect themselves from enslavement. Flight was the most obvious method but there is also evidence that many Africans moved their villages to more inaccessible areas or took other measures to protect themselves. Equiano mentions some of the defensive measures that were taken in his village, Essaka in Nigeria; he explains that when the grown people in the neighbourhood were gone far in the fields to labour, the children assembled together in some of the neighbours' premises to play; while some played, the others climbed on top of trees to look out for any kidnapper that might come upon them for they sometimes took those opportunities of parents' absence to attack and carry off as many children as they could seize. Africans were conscious of kidnapping and they vehemently opposed it in many forms.¹

There is less focus on indigenous forms of resistance in Ghana, even though there is some evidence in the castles which demonstrates that victims of slavery never stopped fighting for their freedom when all odds were clearly stacked against them.²

¹ Orlando, Patterson. *Slavery and Social Death, A Comparative Study* 1982 U. S. A. pp. i-vii; Olaudah, Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa*. The African Union Street 1789 Middle Sex Hospital.pp.1-6.

² Agyemang, O. N. J. S. *Where There Is No Silence: Articulations of Resistance to Enslavement*. Page Links 2008, Accra.p.2.

This thesis is about a different kind of resistance. It discusses the utilisation of warfare in slave resistance in the Builsa Traditional area. The focus is on the rationale, modus operandi and processes that were deployed by the Builsas against slave raiders such as Samory and Babatu.



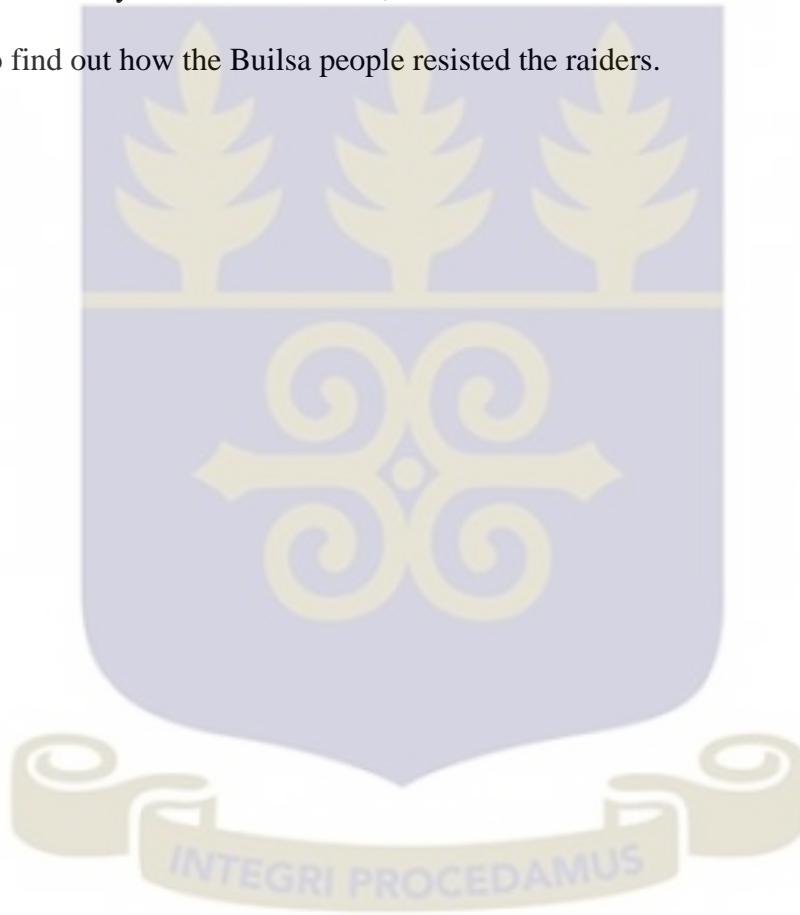
PROBLEM STATEMENT

Indigenous resistance to slavery and slave trade by the Builsa people has not received detailed attention in the historiography of Ghana. While there is a lot of material on resistance by slaves in the New World, the literature on the indigenous resistance to slavery and slave trade by the Builsas is very scanty. It is this gap in our knowledge that inspired this research. I, therefore, seek to highlight the significance of local resistance by the Builsa people in the late 19th century against slavery and slave trade.



OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this research is to investigate resistance strategies adopted by the Builsa people to fight against Samory, Babatu and other bands of raiders. Specific objectives include: to identify what type of political system was in place before the invasion, to determine the military organisation and history of the people, to find the background and history of the slave raiders, to determine the nature of the invasion by the raiders and to find out how the Builsa people resisted the raiders.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are the research questions which guided the conduct of the research: what type of political system was in place before the invasion? Had the Builsa people engaged in wars before the invasion? What were the types of weapons used by the Builsa people in the resistance? What was the size of the army? Where did the slave raiders come from? How did they enter the Builsa territory? What time did the raiders attack? What type of weapons was used by the slave raiders? And; what happened in the course of the invasion?



METHODOLOGY

The semi-structured technique was applied for the conduct of the research work. The formulation of the research questions was predetermined in a sequential order, which enabled both the researcher and informants to stay focussed during the interview section. It also allowed room for follow up questions, which brought clarity to unsatisfied answers to questions.

One to one technique was also employed for the conduct of the research work. Informants provided adequate information at their own pace. The interview section was more interactive and lively as informants tried to impress and to display their level of knowledge in the narrative. However, you could see the difficulty by some of the informants as they tried to recall events.

Group interview was an appropriate technique as it cared for the shortcomings of the one-to-one technique. The lead narrator sometimes found it difficult to give an appropriate answer to a question, and members of the group quickly came in to contribute which made the discussion rich. However, in the course of the discussion, informants shared similar and dissenting views which generated debates, and consequently affected the time allocated for the interview.

I carefully selected informants who have lived in Builsa land many years with in-depth knowledge about the history, customs and traditions of the people, I had the opportunity to interview the paramount chief of the Builsa Traditional area who happens to be a

retired Kasena Nankana District Director of Ghana Education Service, participants of the war dance for over twenty years, landlords, clan heads and some elderly people in Sandema and some other villages.

Open-ended questions gave informants considerable latitude to express themselves, which brought vital information they had on a particular issue as they told the story. Videos of the war dance (The Feok Festival) celebrated annually by the Builsa people offered me the chance to pay particular attention to the facial expression, dance movement, posture and mood of the performers of the dance which gave me an insight into the significance of the resistance to slavery and slave trade.

The examination of artefacts and weapons used by both the raiders and the Builsa people which are kept in Fiisa gave a fair understanding of how and why the Builsa people defeated the raiders. It is important to state that the following tools and materials enabled me to conduct the research: they include, a digital camera for taking pictures at various sites which are useful to the work, a digital recorder for the recording of interviews and subsequent transcription, and a notepad which was used for writing brief reminders during and after the interview, especially, when the transcription was being done.

In all, the exercise was interesting as informants told their story about their victory against the raiders with passion, and pride.

Archives are very important in any historical research, therefore, few of the records in Tamale and Accra which were relevant to the work were utilised such as NRG8/2/204 Domestic Slavery 1927, NRG8/2/205 Slave Dealing 1937-1947 and ADM56/1/169 Kanjarga Native Affairs 1913. The archives proved useful, especially, the ADM56/1/169 in the Accra archives, which supported the fact that the surrounding villages joined forces with the Sandema warriors to defeat the raiders, and not otherwise as claimed by some of the informants who suggested that Sandema warriors alone defeated the raiders. It was not easy in handling the archives because of their brittle and fragile nature which required utmost care not to break them.

Books, journals, articles and the Builsa District profile were utilised for the research work. Some of the books which were used for the project were *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana: from the 15th to the 19th Century* (2007) by Perbi, Akosua Adoma, *Where There is No Silence: Articulations of Resistance to Enslavement* (2006) by Agyemang, O.N.J.S. and *History for Senior Secondary Schools* (1991) by Fynn, J.K. and Addo, F.R.

Journals which were utilised for the research include: *The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast* (1991) by Glassman Jonathan and the *Zabarima Conquest of North West Ghana Part 1* (1965) by Holden J.J. Finally, the articles entitled: *Domestic Slavery in West Africa* (1975) by John Grace and *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa* (1981) by Lovejoy P.E. were some articles which were helpful in this research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before going further into the story on resistance in the Builsa territory, it is important to provide a historical overview of the area. This will enable the reader appreciate the role of particular communities, individuals and cultural systems that played a critical role in the story of resistance

Slave resistance is part of the history of slavery in Ghana. The people of Sankana, a village in the Upper West region of Ghana which suffered from the ruthless activities of Samory and Babatu in the 1880s, utilised huge rocks and caves in the locality for their defence. They normally armed themselves with bows and poisoned arrows, axes, machetes and any weapons they needed for protections. Some stayed on top of the caves all the time especially when vigilantes were necessary at the peak of the raids.³

The deadly journey from Africa to the Americas witnessed several resistances and revolts as obvious signs of opportunities presented themselves to the enslaved on board slave ships such as when slaves realized that crewmembers were incapacitated because of fever, malaria and other illnesses; lax security system: that is leaving weapons, tools and guns unattended to, and few crewmembers on board. Other opportunities included disagreement among crewmembers, having too many slaves unshackled at once; shortages of provisions; large vessels with less crowding of slaves which takes longer days to collect, longer routes, the prevailing weather conditions and vessels within the sight of Africa. Another thing was that those vessels with larger numbers of women were

³ Agyemang., "Where There Is No Silence." p. 19.

more likely to have rebellions. These factors gave the enslaved the courage and braveness to seize vessels which often resulted in severe casualties for both the slaves and crewmembers and sometimes slaves were able to take absolute control of ships and redirect them back to Africa. Sometimes, some of the slaves on board slave ships decided to end it all by jumping into the sea after going through the horrific moments of physical and emotional torture. Death, to them, became the only option.⁴

Along the same lines, there were several resistances in Ghana. Gwollu in the Upper West region encountered raiding activities at the time of the notorious slave raiders Samori and Babatu. The people of Gwollu used local materials for the construction of a defence wall. They used mud or soil mixed with water and the substance was left for a while and then mixed with more water and grass to strengthen the mix. During the construction of the wall, triangular spaces were created in the construction to allow one to see through the holes without being seen and poisoned arrows were shot through the triangles to ward off raiders.⁵

The strategies Africans used to resist slavery and the slave trade had a positive effect, though they did not stop the slave trade but certainly reduced it. Slave traders had to go further inland to look for captives whose offensive, defensive and protective mechanisms resulted in more time spent to locate them, more casualties among the raiders, extra time en route to the coast with greater risks for escape, injury and death and additional costly measures to ensure control over the barracoons and the ships. Resistance held down the

⁴Eltis et al, The Costs of Coercion: *The Economic History Review* 2001. New Series Vol.54. pp.454-476.

⁵ Agyemang. "Where There Is No Silence" p. 27.

numbers entering the trade by raising the costs of carrying on the business, this condition saved millions of Africans from being taken as captives.⁶

The people of Nzulezu, a small settlement in the Western Region of Ghana, built their houses on rivers as a way of escaping from slave raiders. Though they were faced with many challenges, they were safe and had peace because their attackers who clearly knew less about water in an attempt to attack them waded into any part of the water and were drowned in their numbers and that caused them massive casualties which served as a deterrent and a reminder never again to attack the people in the water. The river became a haven and a weapon.⁷

Between the 1500s and the late 1800s, about 12 million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic Ocean and about seven million were displaced through the Sahara desert and the Indian Ocean; these people, in one way or the other, did not walk quietly into servitude; rather they devised various strategies against the slave trade. The exchange of two captives for the freedom of one and the sale of people to acquire weapons in West Africa were strategies intended to protect specific individuals, groups and states from the slave trade. Africans made good use of environmental, physical, cultural and spiritual weapons as mechanisms to limit the impact of the slave dealing

⁶ Eltis, David. *The Rise of African Slavery in The Americas*. Cambridge University Press 2000. Cambridge. P.192.

⁷ Agymang. "Where There Is No Silence." p. 37.

activities of traders, soldiers and kidnappers which ensured short and long term measures.⁸

African populations who were raided for enslavement in the Sokoto caliphate in Nigeria and communities near Lake Chad region utilized mountains, caves, underground tunnels and marshes for protection and reinforced with the building of ramparts, fortresses and other architectural devices and the planting of poisonous and thorny trees and bushes. These refuge sites enabled people to maintain their existence, their culture and their religions.⁹

Gueye illustrates how the people of Cayor and Baol in the Senegambian region used their habitat as a safeguard by reconfiguring the disposition, size and architecture of their houses and villages by using straw as building materials which are highly susceptible to arson; thus, sensing danger, the people of Cayor and Baol would set fire on their houses as a defensive strategy of slowing down the pace of the slavers, and of allowing them advantage of escaping captivity.¹⁰

Western slavers were very cautious and careful when taking people by force out of Africa. In Saint Louis and Goree in Senegal, Saint James in Gambia and Bance in Sierra Leone; slave factories were located on Islands to render escapes and attacks difficult. In

⁸ Diouf, Sylviane. A. *Fighting The Slave Trade: West African Strategies*, Ohio University Press 2003. Athens. pp.ix-x.

⁹ Bah, Thierno. M. *Slave Raiding and Defensive Systems South of Lake Chad. From the 16th to the 19th Century*. James Currey 2004. Oxford. pp. 15-30.

¹⁰ Gueye, Adama. *The Impact of the Slave Trade on Cayor and Baol: Mutations in Habitat and Land Occupancy*. Ohio University Press 2003. Athens. pp. 50-62.

some areas such as Guinea Bissau, the level of distrust and hostility was so high that as soon as people approached the boats, the crew was ordered to take up arms, the cannons were aimed and the fuses were lighted. Several conspiracies and actual revolts by captives together with the cutting of the anchor of the slave ships which led to the disappearance of the slave ships resulted in the death of European slave dealers. The level of fortification of the forts and barracoons attests to the Europeans' distrust and apprehension as they had to protect themselves from the "Negroes" living in the country.¹¹

Resistance did not only take place in Africa; it continued after slaves had landed in the New World. Resistance on the plantations in the New World occurred in the form of infanticide. In some cases, there was a deliberate separation of mothers from their babies at the infant stage to ensure that the bond between the baby and mother was broken at the twelfth month; this was achieved by selling the mother out while the baby was given to an old lady to be taken care of. Slave holders hired people called overseers or taskmasters and some of them, under the influence of alcohol, carried out stiffer punishment and cruelty to slaves at the least provocation by tying their hands and legs to poles and stretching them to a breaking point and unmercifully whipping on their "naked backs until flesh and blood separate from their bodies." Another concern was the frequent rape of females as sexual objects by the taskmasters to satisfy their sexual ego without respect to their human dignity. Exposure to long hours of work, both day and night, especially during the harvesting time made the slaves emaciated and wretched such that dogs were more valuable and treated better than them. This erosion of physical and emotional

¹¹ Diouf. "Fighting the Slave Trade" p. xi.

feelings compelled some nursing mothers to kill their babies as a form of revolt and rebellion since the status of slavery was transferable from parents to their progeny.¹²

On the plantations, Africans resisted their enslavement in a number of ways. Sometimes they deliberately damaged property and destroyed livestock. Others ate contaminants to make themselves ill and unable to work. Sometimes, slaves temporarily ran away from the plantations as a way of bargaining with the plantations' owner or his attorney. They would find a sympathetic free person to bargain on their behalf for a number of things, for example, better treatment, less severe working conditions, sometimes for bigger food rations or even for a particular cruel overseer to be dismissed.¹³

Maroon men, throughout the hemisphere, developed extraordinary skills in guerrilla warfare. To the bewilderment of the Europeans, whose rigid and conventional tactics were learned on the open battlefields of Europe, these highly adaptable and mobile warriors took maximum advantage of local environments, striking and withdrawing with great rapidity, making extensive use of ambushes to catch their adversaries in cross fire. They fought only when and where they chose, depending on reliable intelligence networks among non- maroons both slaves and white settlers and often communicated by horns.¹⁴

¹² Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave*. No. 25 Corn Hill 1845. Boston. Pp.3-14.

¹³ Azikiwe, Abayomi. *The Abolition of the Slave Trade and African Resistance: Pan-African News Wire* 2007.p43

¹⁴ Gomes, F. *Other Black Atlantic Borders: Escape Routes, Ymocambosy, and Fear of Sedition in Brazil and French Guiana*. New West Indian Guide 2003. Leiden.pp. 253-278

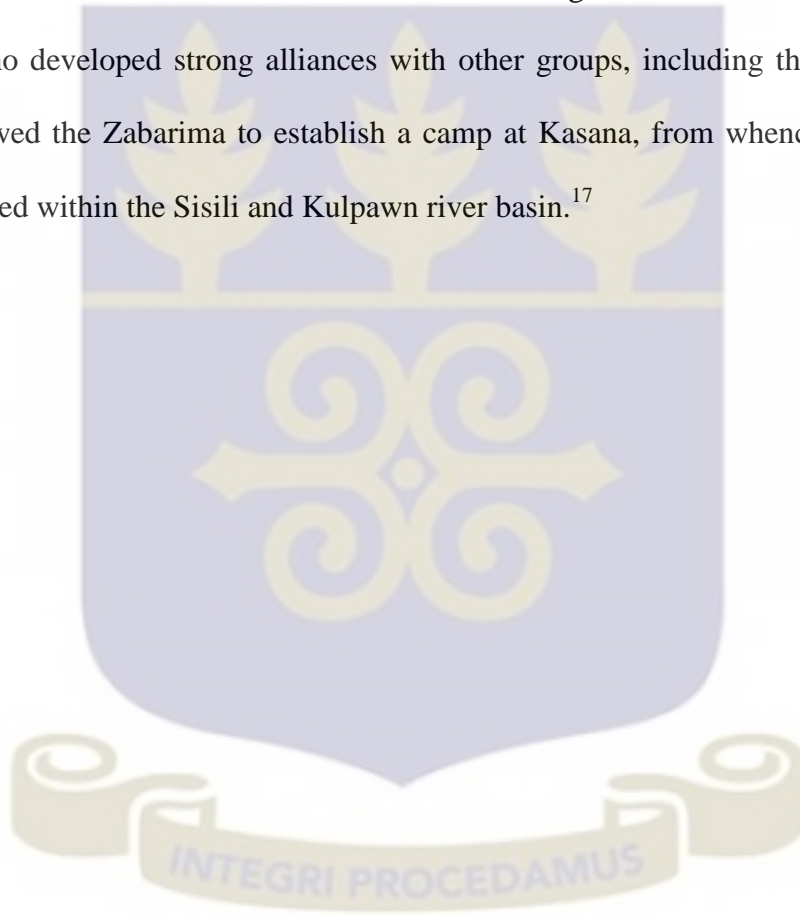
In Ganvie (Benin), the people built small towns on stilts at the edge or in the middle of the lakes. This innovation gave them a clear view of approaching raiders and allowed them enough time to take the appropriate measures. Some rivers were diverted so that they would not bring ships near their settlements. Africans established teamwork for their protection; left the paths to their houses and villages overgrown with weeds; stationed armed groups at vulnerable points; covered their roofs with noisy leaves to detect would-be kidnappers and built their houses in mazes to disorient and confuse attackers.¹⁵

Slaves were outsiders who were acquired by force, denied the rights and honour of full membership in local communities and kin groups, and coerced to labour for their masters. The slaves resisted this alienating state of affairs most often by demanding what was denied them, specifically, more autonomous participation in local social reproduction, which is, fuller membership and local institutions of community and kinship. Slave resistance then often took the form of struggle for fuller rights of social inclusion, or for fuller access to local community institution. Through such struggles, slaves sought to open up the rules governing inclusion, that is, to redefine dominant culture, to secure the rights to participate in commercial agriculture and petty trade or the struggle of slaves in some Swahili communities to participate autonomously in institutions of commerce, religion and urban politics. In cases where they were opposed by their masters, slaves rebelled, followed by withdrawal to join those who had fled earlier in order to build their own communities in near total autonomy.¹⁶

¹⁵ Agyemang. "Where There Is No Silence." p. 7.

¹⁶ Glassman, Jonathan. *The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast: The Journal of African History*, Cambridge University Press 1991.p285.

Slave raiding, actually intensified in Northern Ghana in the 19th century. Hundreds of slaves were sold at markets following the Zabarima raids into Northern Ghana in the second half of the 19th century. The Zabarima entered Northern Ghana from the region around modern Mali following the fall of the Songhai Empire as mercenaries to Dagomba. They were involved in raids in Grunshi, a region of autochthonous peoples associated with the middle belt of Northern Ghana. Dagomba later lost control of the Zabarima who developed strong alliances with other groups, including the Sisala. This alliance allowed the Zabarima to establish a camp at Kasana, from whence they raided villages located within the Sisili and Kulpawn river basin.¹⁷



¹⁷Holden, J. J. *The Zabarima Conquest of North –West Ghana Part 1*: Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana. 1965. Vol. 8. pp.60-86.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BUILSAS AND THEIR TERRITORY

The Builsa traditional area is found in the Upper East region of Ghana. It lies between longitudes 1⁰ 05' West and 1⁰ 35' West and Latitudes 10⁰ 20' north 10⁰ 50 north. It is bounded on the north and east by the Kassena-Nankana East and West districts respectively and on the West by the Sissala East and Kassena-Nankana West districts and on the south by West Mamprusi and Kassena-Nankana East districts respectively. The Builsa traditional area covers an area of 2,220 km² and constitutes 25.1% of the total land area of the Upper East Region. The Builsa traditional area has 155 communities clustered into eight (8) zones namely: Sandema, Chuchuliga, Wiaga, Siniensi/ Doninga / Bachonsa, Kadema, Gbedema/ Kanjarga, Chansa / Gobsa / Zamsa and Fumbisi/ Gbedemblisi/ Wiesi/ Uwasi.¹⁸

The traditional system is governed by chiefs. The head of the traditional council is the Sandema-Nab who is the paramount chief of the Builsa traditional area supported by seven divisional chiefs and village heads called “Kanbon-Nab”.

Currently, the Builsa traditional area is divided into two districts: Builsa North and Builsa South respectively. The Builsa North district is one of the thirteen municipal and district assemblies in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The district was created in 1988 from the then Kasena Nankana District by Legislative Instrument 1441. However, the new LI for the creation of Builsa North District in 2012 is LI 2148.¹⁹ The Builsa North District

¹⁸ Builsa District profile LI 1441. 1988

¹⁹ Builsa North District profile LI 2148. 2012

covers an estimated land area of 816.44030 km² and constitutes about 12.1% of the total land area of the Upper East Region with Sandema as the administrative capital. The district has an estimated population of 56477 with 108 communities according to the 2010 population and housing census exercise. Below is the district map of Builsa North.

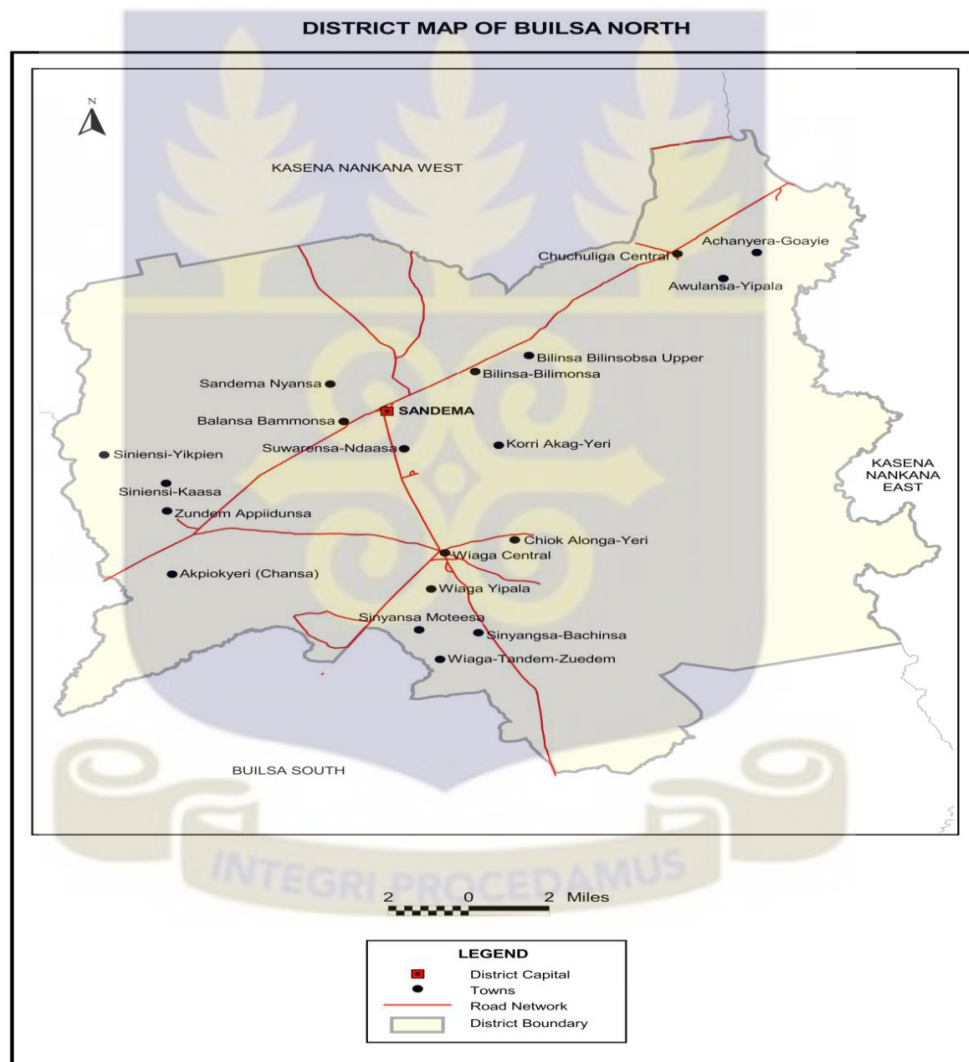


Figure 1: From the Builsa North District Profile L I 2148. 2012

The Builsa south district is one of the newly created districts carved out of the then Builsa district by Legislative Instrument LI 2104 in 2012 in the Upper East Region with Fumbisi as its administrative capital. The district covers an estimated land area of 1,403.5597 km² and constitutes about 13% of the total land area of the Upper East Region. The district has an estimated population of 36,514 with 47 communities according to the 2010 population and housing census.²⁰ Below is the Builsa South district map.

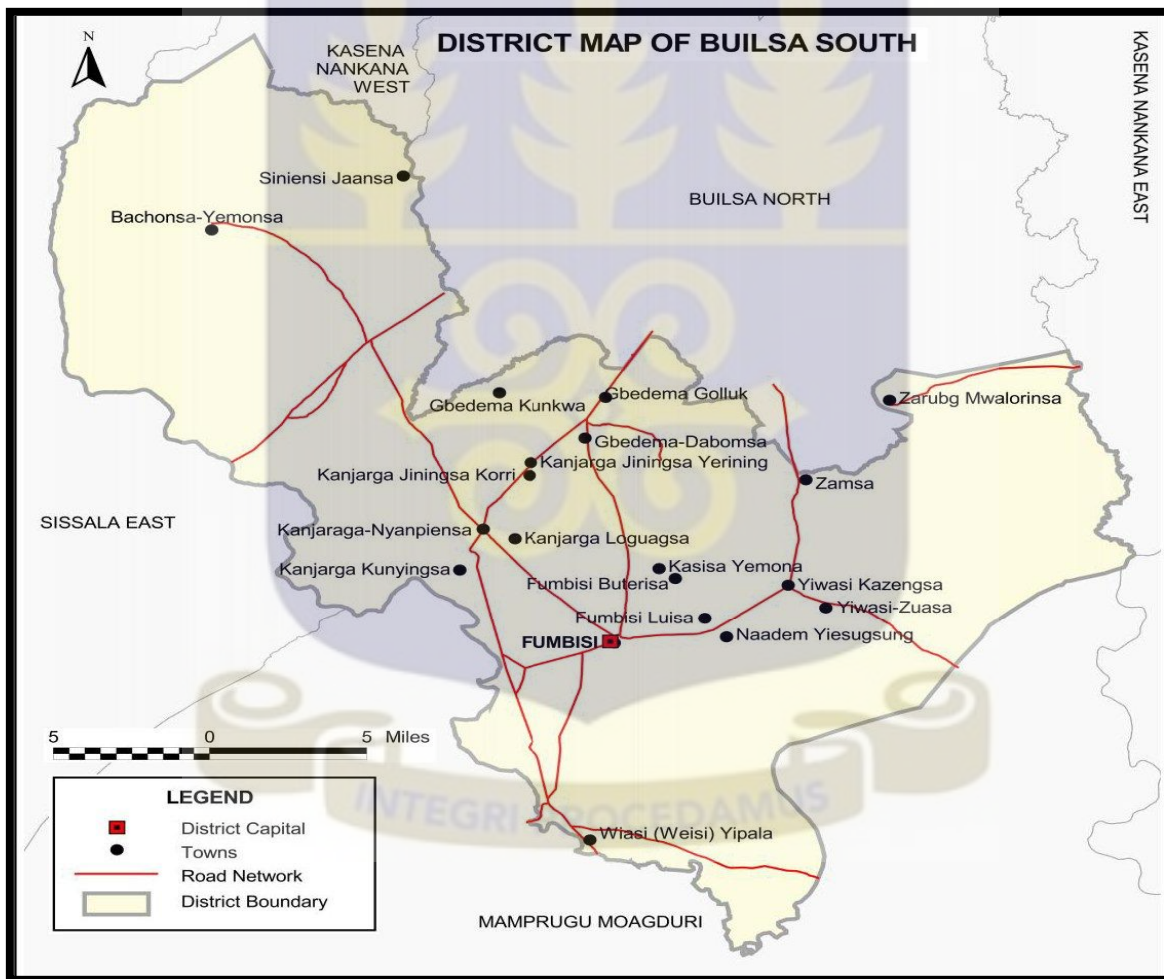


Figure 2: From the Builsa South District Profile LI 2104. 2012

²⁰ Builsa South District profile LI 2104. 2012

According to oral history, the real founder of the Builsa chiefdom was Atuga who came to the Builsa land as a stranger. Atuga is believed to be a Mamprusi from the royal family in Nalerigu. Atuga migrated from Nalerigu as a result of disputes between him and his siblings. He was the eldest in the family and the next to succeed the skin after the king who was very old. His younger brothers ganged against him, killed his wife who was pregnant and forced open the stomach to see whether she was carrying a male or female child. His brothers feared losing the skin if the foetus was male. Atuga realised that his life was in danger and after he had been persuaded by his loved ones to flee, he migrated with some Mamprusi people to settle at Gambaga near the escarpment. After a while, he moved northwards to settle at Atugapusik, present day Builsa land.²¹

The Mamprusi immigrants who came to settle in Builsa land met indigenous people who had already occupied the land. The indigenes of the land are called the Builsa people who speak the language, Buili. The Builsa people who were the aborigines of the land outnumbered the migrants who were few and in the course of time, the language, customs, beliefs and traditions of the majority were assimilated and adopted by the immigrants.²²

The Builsas, who were highly religious, revered their ancestors and the deities who they believe have the power to punish and to bless. The Builsa state was an acephalous one and had many communities called “Dɔkɔ”. Each “Dɔkɔ” was under a headman. Community

²¹ Nab Azagsuk, A. A. Paramount chief of the Builsa Traditional area and a retired Kasena Nankana District Director of Ghana Education Service. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015; Schott, R. *Sources for a History of the Builsa in Northern Ghana*. (Frobenius Institute 1977) pp.141-168.

²² Amoak, A. Elder, Sandema Nab Palace. Interviewed, 10 August, 2015.

heads and the people were under the control and authority of the earth priest who was acknowledged and recognized as the owner of the land “Teng-Nyono”. The Builsa people believed nobody owns the land and cannot claim ownership. All lands belong to the ancestors and the deities who have entrusted the lands into the hands of the *Teng-Nyono* as a custodian.²³

The Teng-Nyono was a very powerful man among the Builsas; he was feared and respected not because he could exercise physical punishment but the religious power he wielded. Disobeying him was tantamount to disregarding the ancestors and the deities which attracted death through strange and sudden sickness, and sometimes incurable diseases and illnesses. He was a religious leader but in the performance of his functions, religious and political leadership could not be separated. He was the mouthpiece of the deities and the ancestors as well as the link between the people and the divine elements. He led processions and recessions of major events such as the “Feok” festival which means “a period of plenty and sacrifice to the deities and ancestors” which marks the end of the harvesting season and the beginning of the dry season.²⁴

The Builsas lived in relative peace and did not organize themselves into a formidable political unit to protect and defend the state in times of wars because they believed that the ancestors and the deities were more powerful than any human organization. This philosophy was based on their daily encounter and experience with the deities and

²³ Anankan, A. Chief Priest of the Fiisa shrine in Sandema. Fiisa is where weapons of the defeated slave raiders Samory and Babatu are kept under his custody. . Interviewed, 05 September, 2015.

²⁴ Alafiisa, A. Retired Police Officer and a family of the chief priest. Interviewed, 25 September, 2015.

ancestors for centuries and the fact that no group of people had actually waged war to claim their land.²⁵

Then came Atuga and his people who settled in Builsaland and intermingled and intermarried with the local women. Atuga had four sons: Akadem, Awiak, Asam and Asinien in order of seniority. Asam, who was the third born, developed qualities of astute leadership, which provoked jealousy from Akadem, the senior brother. This situation constantly led to a physical confrontation between the two. The other two siblings always rallied behind Asam against the elder. After the death of their father, Atuga, Akadem should have inherited and succeeded their father; but as a result of the dispute, all of them separated and moved from Atugapusik, the original habitat to found their own communities.²⁶

Akadem, the elder, moved and founded the Kadema chiefdom; Awiak also founded the Wiak chiefdom; Asam founded the Sandema chiefdom and Asinien also founded the Siniensa chiefdom. It is important to state that Chuchuliga and Doninga were later founded by the descendants of Asam. However, Fumbisi and Gbedema were later founded by immigrants from the Mamprusi people in Gambaga who settled among the indigenes of the Builsas; this was made possible under the leadership of Afina. Kanjaga, Bachonsa, Zamsa and Gbedembilisi remained indigenous Builsas without any interference from the Mamprusi migrants.²⁷

²⁵ Nab Azagsuk, A.A. The Paramount Chief of the Builsa Traditional Area. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015.

²⁶ Akatuk, A. Clan Head of the Tankunsa community in Sandema. Interviewed, 17 August, 2015.

²⁷ Nab Azagsuk, A. A. The Paramount Chief of the Builsa Traditional Area. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015; Ajuik, T. Family head of Ajuiyeri Kalijiisah in Sandema. Interviewed, 28, August, 2015.

The chiefdoms were ruled separately and were independent of each other. Fortunately for Asam, the geographical location of Sandema enhanced its fortunes as it became the centre of commercial activities due to accessibility and high population. This commercial power was converted to political power. The presence of Teng-Nyono, who was in charge of the state shrine “Azagsuk” (chief deity), also provided the needed spiritual assistance to the town. With the enhanced status of Sandema based on commerce and spirituality, it naturally became a settlement of essence as compared to other communities. With time, it became the seat of traditional political power of all Builsas.²⁸

The Sandema chief became the paramount chief of the Builsa traditional area when the Builsa territory was annexed in 1902 by the British. The British endorsed his title: “Nab Ayieta” as a result of the decisive defeat of the slave raiders in the 1890s by the people of Sandema. With this official endorsement by the British, all the chiefs in Builsaland owed allegiance to the authority and control of the Sandema chief as the paramount and supreme ruler of the Builsa traditional area.²⁹

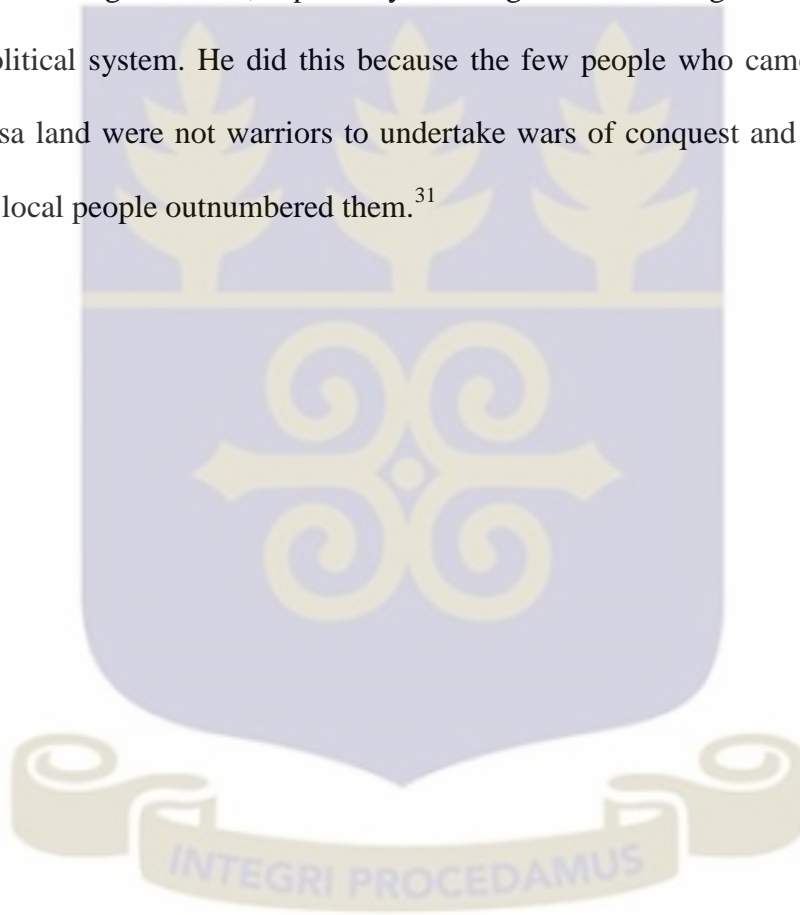
Originally, the Builsa people did not have chiefs and had no knowledge of the chieftaincy system; it was Atuga who introduced the chieftaincy institution among the Builsas. Being a royal, he saw the need to organise the local people into a political unit along the lines of Nalerigu chieftaincy system where the chief was recognized as the political head of the state and the office of the Tendana or Teng-Nyono was maintained to perform his

²⁸ Anankan, A. The Chief Priest of the Fiisa shrine in Sandema. Interviewed, 05 September, 2015; Alafiisa, A. Retired Police Officer, Fiisa Sandema. Interviewed, 25 September, 2015.

²⁹ Nab Azagsuk. The Paramount Chief of the Builsa Traditional Area. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015.

functions (performing sacrifices to the state deity, leading processions and recessions and the pouring of libation during the Feok festival) in the state.³⁰

Atuga was able to achieve these noble acts not through wars of conquest to bring the local people under his control; but he applied wisdom by employing the skills, techniques and tactics of marriage alliance, diplomacy and negotiations to organize the indigenes under one political system. He did this because the few people who came with him to settle in Builsa land were not warriors to undertake wars of conquest and in fact it was clear that the local people outnumbered them.³¹



³⁰PRAAD, Tamale, NRG8/2/113, Mamprusi Constitutional Affairs (including Mamprusi State Council), 1932-1956; Akanwandami, A. Clan Head, Abiliyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 05 August, 2015.

³¹Abakisi, A. Family head Abakisiyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 15 August, 2015; Amoak, A. Elder, Sandema Nab Palace. Interviewed, 10 August, 2015; Akatuk, A. Clan head Tankunshah Sandema. Interviewed, 17 August, 2015.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORIGIN OF SLAVERY AMONG BUILSAS

From the Western point of view, Miers and Kopytoff stipulate that, a slave is a commodity to be bought and sold and inherited without regards to his or her feelings, and may be ill-treated sometimes, even killed with impunity. Their progeny inherit their status.³²

Lovejoy defines slaves as property, and for that matter they were owned and were completely at the disposal of their masters. The labour power of slaves, their sexuality and their reproductive capacities were not theirs by right, and could be used whatever way desired by their owners.³³

From the Ghanaian concept of slavery, Perbi explains that a slave was a person who had been bought in cash or kind or acquired through various means by someone or a group of people to work for them. Perbi adds that with time, slaves were integrated into the family and could be well-treated. They could rise from the social, economic and political ladder to become prominent persons in society, and their status may change as slaves.³⁴

According to the oral history of the Builsa people, a slave (yoma) is a person who is in someone's house and provides services for that person; he or she is not a member of that household or community. It may also refer to a person who is a stranger (Nichano) and

³² Miers And Kopytoff. *Slavery In Africa: Historical And Anthropological Perspectives*, Wisconsin 1977. U. S. A. pp. 1-5.

³³ Lovejoy, P. E. *The Ideology of Slavery In Africa*. Beverly Hills 1981. U. S.A. pp.1-4.

³⁴ Perbi. "A History Of Indigenous Slavery." Pp 3, 133.

has no root or link in that family and has become part of that family as a result of arrangement to serve that family as long as he or she lives.³⁵

Builsas believe slavery (yomtri) started a long time ago when the people experienced famine or severe hunger; in this condition, the poor as well as those with large families could not feed their families and themselves, meanwhile, they needed to survive. It therefore became incumbent on heads of families to identify wealthy families in the community or nearby communities and take some of their children to such families and negotiate or bargain in exchange for large quantities of millet, sorghum, rice and other foodstuffs in order to be able to feed the rest of the family.³⁶

Another means by which people obtained slaves was when people got lost, especially in the forest, and could not trace where they came from; they were normally taken in by those who discovered them or they were given to the wealthy in the community. Again, slaves were acquired when people decided to abandon their villages and offer themselves willingly to well-to-do families. This was the case of individuals who had lost hope, who were fed up with their communities or who could not cope with the hardships of life. It is very important to note that the Builsa people were not involved in the deliberate buying and selling of slaves or any form of attempt to capture people into slavery.³⁷

³⁵Abil, A. Elder, Sandema Nab Palace. Interviewed, 20 August, 2015.

³⁶Nab Azagsuk. The Paramount Chief of Builsa Traditional Area. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015; Adaawen, A. Elder and one of the caretakers of the Fiisa shrine in Sandema. . Interviewed, 05 September, 2015.

³⁷ Akanlang, I. Landlord Akanlangyeri Fumbisi. Interviewed, 31 August, 2015.

The Builsa people were basically farmers. They cultivated crops and kept animals, therefore, slaves were fundamentally used to take care of animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, guinea fowls and other fowls; slaves were involved in cultivation too. The activities mentioned above were meant for male slaves. The female slaves performed household chores such as cooking for the family, fetching water and taking care of the house and most importantly, when they were of age, their owners married them to bear children for them or they were given to other relatives for marriage. Once marriage occurred, the women were no longer slaves nor were the children that they gave birth to.³⁸

Both male and female slaves carried loads, especially, farm products from the farm to the house or market and vice-versa since head portage was the major means of transport in those days. These slaves also ran errands for their owners and they were used as messengers by their masters because of the dispersed nature of the settlement pattern of the Builsa territory. Slaves were normally given new names by their owners; these names could either be entirely new names or new names added to the existing names. Whatever it was, they had to bear the family name of their owners so that in the community they will be properly recognized as members of the family and not strangers.³⁹

³⁸ Aduok, A. Elder, Sandema Nab Palace. Interviewed, 24 August, 2015; Abil, A. Elder, Sandema Nab Palace. Interviewed, 20 August, 2015; Akanwandami, A. Clan head Abiliyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 05 August, 2015.

³⁹ PRAAD, TAMALE, NRG8/2/204, *Domestic Slavery 1927*; Perbi, A. A. *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana: From the 15th to the 19th Century*. (Sub-saharan Publishers 2007) Accra, Ghana. pp.114-115; Nab Azagsuk. The Paramount Chief of Builsa Traditional Area. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015.

It is interesting to note that slaves were very few in Builsa land in that they were regarded as humans and must be treated as such; therefore, certain criteria had to be met before one could keep a slave in the household. The first of such requirements was whether the person was wealthy, that is, if the person had the following: cattle, sheep, goats, guinea fowls and fowls in large quantities and so many barns containing food stuffs that could feed his family and still have surplus. Another requirement was that the household must be in a proper shape or healthy enough to accommodate extra people, and the final one was how an individual treated members of his family.⁴⁰

The keeping of slaves was a male affair because females did not own properties either in their husband's house or their father's house as customs and traditions demand. It was incumbent upon the slave owner to provide shelter, food, cloths and protection for the slave to ensure his or her security.⁴¹

Slaves were treated with the utmost respect and dignity as human beings in the household and the community. Physical abuse such as beatings and whipping were not visited on the slaves and they were not sexually exploited or abused as their consent was sought for in relation to marriage. Male slaves could marry daughters of their owners or their relatives and could inherit their owners and become landlords in case there was no male to inherit the father after his death, and also if the male ones were too young to manage the family affairs, the slave would be the caretaker until they became of age. It is also interesting to note that slaves and their owners and family ate from the same pot and they were not

⁴⁰ Abakisi, A. Family head Abakisiyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 15 August, 2015.

⁴¹ Anyana, B. Clan head Asangyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 15 August, 2015.

discriminated against in terms of food, shelter and cloths. It was difficult for a visitor to distinguish between a slave and a family member.⁴²

Slaves were given the opportunity to raise their own families, own properties such as land for farming, animals and birds given to them to start a new life. It was a form of settlement for working for their owners for a long time and they became more responsible and took decisions regarding their lives. However, during cultivation, slaves and family members worked on the family land first because farm produce from such lands were used to sacrifice to the deities and ancestors before working on individual farms. Slaves could also demand assistance from their owners if a challenge was beyond their control.⁴³

Slaves were integrated into the family and the society and were treated well as human beings with dignity and with rights emanating from the fear of the wrath of the deities and ancestors. The Builsa people believed that the cry and tears of a “stranger” who was harmless could incur the anger of the deities and ancestors as they have the power to bless and curse as traditional norms must be strictly observed by the individuals, families and the society at large as they protect and watch over them. That was why slaves were normally kept by the wealthy to provide all the necessary conditions to make them comfortable and also feel as members of the family.⁴⁴

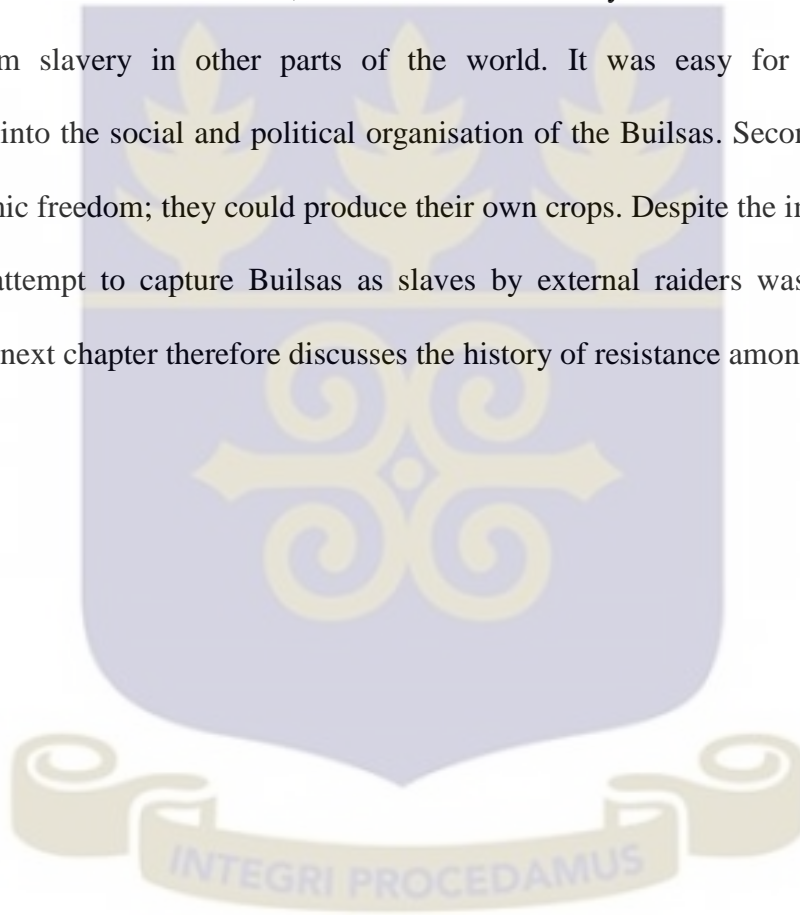
⁴² John Grace. *Domestic Slavery in West Africa*: Frderick Muller Limited 1975, London NW26LE.pp1-14; Akandawami, A. Clan head Abiliyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 05 August, 2015.

⁴³ Akanlang, A. Landlord Fumbisi. Interviewed, 31 August, 2015.

⁴⁴ Amoak, A. Elder, Sandema Nab Palace. Interviewed, 10 August, 2015.

In the society, nobody, not even the owner of a slave, had the right to openly call him or her a slave (yoma); it was an unpardonable offence and such offenders were arraigned before the traditional court for the chief and his elders to pass judgment and in most cases they were fined to pay a certain number of sheep and cowries.⁴⁵

From what has been narrated so far, it is evident that slavery in Builsa land was entirely different from slavery in other parts of the world. It was easy for slaves to be incorporated into the social and political organisation of the Builsas. Secondly, they had some economic freedom; they could produce their own crops. Despite the internal uses of slaves, any attempt to capture Builsas as slaves by external raiders was immediately resisted. The next chapter therefore discusses the history of resistance among the Builsas.



⁴⁵ Nab Azagsuk. Paramount Chief of Builsa. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015; Aduok, A. Elder, Sandema Nab Palace. Interviewed, 24 August, 2015.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESISTANCE

The institution of slavery and slave trade in Africa is not a new concept. It existed prior to the coming of the Europeans in the 15th century. One of the important events that occurred between the 3rd and the 14th centuries was the Tran-Saharan Caravan Trade which was conducted across the Sahara between the Western Sudan and North Africa. Slaves featured as one of the items of trade; but they were not as important as horses, gold and salt. Therefore, the demand for slaves and the impact of the trade were less, as slaves were used as labourers, domestic hands and trade assistance. Slaves were well treated and regarded as humans.⁴⁶

However, the introduction of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade by the Europeans brutalised and changed the character of slavery and slave trade in Africa. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which started in the 16th century and reached its peak in the 18th century, saw an insatiable demand for African slaves by Europeans to work in the mines and plantations of the New World. The introduction of guns and gun powder in Africa aided in raids and warfare which became the major means of acquiring slaves and that revolutionised the indigenous system of slavery and slave trade which fed the trans- Atlantic slave, because it was more profitable for Africans to deal in slaves.⁴⁷

In 1807, the trans-Atlantic slave trade had officially been abolished by the British; however, the slave trade was not fully suppressed in Africa because the abolition act was

⁴⁶ Fynn, J. K. And Addo, F. R. *History For Senior Secondary Schools*: Evans Brothers Limited 1991. London. pp.84-85.

⁴⁷ Perbi, A. A. "A History Of Indigenous Slavery" pp.23-26.

applicable to Europeans who were involved in the trade, and not indigenous slave trade. The French were not very strict on the abolishing law, and the activities of European interlopers provided market for indigenous slave trade. Slaves were taken from the Northern territories through Volta to Popo in Benin for sale.⁴⁸

In the 1890s, the British extended their authority and activities to the Northern territories and discovered the activities of Samory and Babatu who raided the north for slaves. The British tried to stop them; but these marauders (Samory and Babatu) had entered Builsa territory to raid for slaves and were resisted by the Builsa people.⁴⁹

Resistance to slavery and slave trade is part and parcel of the history of the Builsa people. They had resisted slavery without external support. They had been able to defeat the notorious slave raiders in the northern part of Ghana in 1890s, some of the raiders included, Samory and Babatu and their army who consistently came to Builsa land for slaves.⁵⁰

Samory and Babatu were Zambarima people from Niger whose main occupation was the raiding and capturing of people for sale. They operated within the savanna belt of West Africa. Builsa territory became attractive to slave raiders because the place was endowed with young men and women. Samory and Babatu attacked the Builsa people in the 1890s to capture slaves for sale, and Sandema was the focus of their attack because it was a

⁴⁸ Perbi, A. A. "A History of Indigenous Slavery" p.156

⁴⁹ Schott, R. "Sources for a History of the Builsa" p.145

⁵⁰ Avaripo, A. War dancer (Feok festival) for over 40 years, Nyasah Sandema. Interviewed, 02 September, 2015.

thriving commercial centre with a well-organised political structure. As a result, in the later part of the 1890s, the slave raiders marched straight to Sandema after raiding the Sisala people in Wa.⁵¹

They entered Sandema from the west through Doninga, Siniensa to Suworisa in Sandema. They made a camp at Surorisa where captured slaves were kept. The camp also helped them to carry out more raids since they had adequate knowledge of the communities around. The constant raids made Builsas decide to wage a war against the raiders. The war was staged in broad day light at Akumcharm in Sandema which is 400m close to Sandema Senior High School. The raiders had a very large army and were commanded by four people: Samory, Babatu, Chapoga and Amaria. Samory was the main leader of the four assisted by Babatu. The army was divided into two: the mounted troops, that is, the horse riders and the infantry who were trained on how to handle weapons and horses for warfare. They were given basic techniques on how to attack, defend, capture and kill. The army of the raiders increased by the day after each invasion; as they captured slaves some were incorporated into the army and the rest were sold into slavery; therefore, the greater part of the army consisted of slaves.⁵²

The slave raiders used weapons such as guns that were procured probably from Asante traders. This conclusion is borne out of the local name of the gun “kambon diok” meaning “Asante stick”. The Asantes also obtained the guns from European traders which indicate that the guns were not locally manufactured. They used long swords with

⁵¹ Holden, J. J. *The Zabarima Conquest of North-West Ghana Part 1*. Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana. 1965. pp.60-86; Nab Azagsuk. *The Paramount Chief of Builsa*. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015.

⁵² Avaripo, A. *War dancer (Feok Festival) Nyasah Sandema*. Interviewed, 02 September, 2015.

symbols and designs on them and serial numbers on the parts of the guns are indications that they were of foreign origin and could be traced to the individual European country that manufactured them.⁵³ Axes and spears coupled with the use of horses gave them great advantage over any organized local people. Villages were attacked early in the morning to ensure that the people had not left to their farms and hunting; fire was used to burn the villages down since houses were constructed of wood, mud and thatch. In the heat of the attack, those who showed signs of resistance were killed and those who surrendered were taken as captives, especially the young ones, because buyers preferred the young and the energetic. Captives were bound with chains, shackles, ropes and woods around their necks, legs and hands and some were guarded by the army. Apart from slaves, the raiders took valuable items such as cattle, sheep, goats, grains and other foodstuffs which were used to feed the army.⁵⁴

The Sandema people got information about the coming of the raiders through the Tengnyono called Atankab who was the earth priest in charge of the Sandema shrine Azagsuk located in Fiisah. It was revealed to him that “some guinea fowls without feathers” would be coming to destroy and change the destiny of the Builsa people by enslaving their young ones. In Builsa land, guinea fowls are common birds used for sacrifices to deities and also used to prepare meals for visitors. The feathers symbolize the beauty, power, and life of the guinea fowl; therefore, the feathers are removed after they have been killed. Thus, the raiders were declared defeated in the spiritual realm by the deity Azagsuk before they entered Builsa territory.

⁵³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG8/2/1, The History and Organisation of the “Kabonse” in Dagomba.

⁵⁴ Afobrikami, J. Landlord Afobrikamiyeri Chuchuliga. Interviewed, 08 September, 2015.

Atankab quickly informed the Sandema chief Nab Anankum who organised a meeting of council of elders and headmen about the impending invasion while the earth priest was asked to go and prepare spiritually for the war.⁵⁵ Atankab, knowing the task was beyond him, went and brought a soothsayer called Najaaw who lived beyond the Builsa territory for consultation on how to protect his people and also win the war. During the consultation, Atankab was asked to sacrifice a black sheep to the shrine Azagsuk and if during the sacrifice rain fell before he descended from the rock; it was a sign of victory and it did rain after the sacrifice. It was also revealed to him that fifteen of his kinsmen would die in the war and that would be the only casualties and nobody would sustain any injury. This was a form of sacrifice of the few for the interest of the many. The earth priest was also asked to secure Sandema territory spiritually by demarcating the place with pegs before the invaders entered Sandema territories and he started from Nyansah, Kandem, Balansah, Suworisah, Kori, Bilinsah, Kalijisa, and Longsa.⁵⁶

The Builsa people had never engaged in any war before and had no army; the people were basically farmers and hunters and it was their first time of going to war. The chief, on his part, assembled the people and indicated that “every farmer was a hunter and every hunter was a warrior; as long as you were a hunter, you were qualified to go to war after all only brave men can go into the forest and hunt for buffalos and wear their horns”⁵⁷ but the Teng-nyono instructed that only clean men (men who were not engaged in any form

⁵⁵ Anankan, A. Chief Priest of Fiisa shrine Sandema. Interviewed, 05 September, 2015.

⁵⁶ Anankan, A. Chief Priest Fiisa Shrine Sandema. Interviewed, 05 September, 2015; Alafiisa, I. Retired Police Officer Fiisa Sandema. Interviewed, 25 August, 2015; Adaawen, A. Elder Fiisa/War Dancer (Feok Festival). Interviewed, 05 September, 2015.

⁵⁷ Nab Azagsuk. The Paramount Chief of Builsa. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015.

of sexual acts prior to the war) who were hunters were to go to the war in order to avoid disaster.⁵⁸

The Builsa people used local weapons such as bows and poisoned arrows together with special axes during the war. These weapons were inferior as compared to the superior weapons used by the raiders. In the preparation of the local weapons by the Builsa people, the materials used in making the bows, and poisoned arrows and special axes were obtained locally from bamboo; the arrow heads and the axes were made from iron ore which was in abundance in Builsa land. The poison was obtained from the bile of a crocodile, parts of wild animals, and the barks of some trees mixed together and boiled. The arrow heads were then lowered into the boiling poison to allow the poison stick to the metal. The arrows were removed and dried at a cool but airy place; the production of poisoned arrows required the services of soothsayers and, traditional herbalists and priests who were endowed with the knowledge and efficacy of medicine in the area, this is because obtaining the materials from the forest and the preparation of the poison required observation and performance of certain rituals, and those who were believed to have links to the deities and ancestors were capable of doing that. After the mass production of the poisoned arrows, they were normally tested on animals such as the monkey to check the potency of the poison; the quicker the death of the animal demonstrated the level of potency of the poison and the success of the production.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Nab Azagsuk. The Paramount Chief of Builsa. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015.

⁵⁹ Aguboro, A. Performer of war dance (Feok Festival) Nayeri Sandema. Interviewed, 06 August, 2015.

Before the start of the war, some of the warriors were asked to go and spy the camp of the raiders and fifteen of them were killed by Samory and Babatu's army and all the fifteen were the kinsmen of the earth priest as predicted by the soothsayer; this initiated the war. During the encounter, something mysterious happened and it baffled the minds of the raiders because one of the deities of Sandema called Acharm (the deity of bees) unleashed a swarm of bees ahead of the local warriors into the camp of Samory and Babatu, the raiders, and they could not stand the sting of the bees. Also, they became confused and the local warriors took advantage of the situation and fired arrows into the army. They targeted the raiders and their horses. Those who were hit with arrows but were not dead were finished off with axes.⁶⁰



Plate 1 *Poisoned arrows used by the Builsa people during the slave raids*

Picture by Aadmin Amos

⁶⁰ Akanyaba, A. Interviewed, 05 August, 2015. Family head and caretaker of the Fiisa shrine.



Plate 2: *Weapons used by the raiders at the "battle of Sandema"*

Picture by Ademin Amos



Plate 3: *Researcher, chief priest and keepers of the shrine in Fiisa at Sandema*

Picture by Ademin Barnabas



Plate 4: *Researcher examining weapons:*

Picture by Ademin Barnabas



Plate 5: *Parts of guns and other metallic objects used by the raiders:*

Picture by Ademin Amos



Plate 6: Researcher discussing with the caretakers of the Fiisa shrine:

Picture by Ademin Barnabas

The local warriors employed the technique of hunting animals in the forest during the war. They ensured that they fired arrows at raiders with little chance of missing their target; through this, they killed more raiders. Samory and Babatu upon realizing that their lives were in danger left the battle ground and took the eastern route and got to a valley in Kori called Abuga valley. Abuga was a swampy area; hence, their horses got stuck forcing them to abandon them and flee on foot. One of the narrators remarked that

“nature was against the activities of the slavers”⁶¹. However, it is important to state that Babatu and Samory were never captured and killed in Builsa territory; but the wife of Babatu was captured and tied under a sheanut tree and she cried and cried until she died. That tree has been nicknamed “The weeping sheanut tree”⁶² (Akumcharm). The raiders were defeated miserably and their weapons were collected as war relics and were kept at the Sandema shrine in Fiisah.⁶³



Plate 7: *Abuga valley where Samori and Babatu’s horses got stuck which left them with no option than to abandon them and flee on foot:*

Picture by Ademin Amos

⁶¹ Abakisi, A. Family head Abakisiyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 15 August, 2015.

⁶² Builsa North District Profile LI 2148. 2012; Aguboro, A. Performer of war dance (Feok Festival) Nayeri Sandema. Interviewed, 06 August, 2015.

⁶³ Avaripo, A. War dancer (Feok Festival) Nyasah Sandema. Interviewed, 02 September, 2015.



Plate 8: *The Researcher and tour guide at Abuga valley in Sandema in the Upper East Region:*

Picture by Ademin Barnabas



Plate 9: *Suwarinsa (The battleground for the war between the Builsas and the raiders)*

Picture by Ademin Amos



Plate 10: *Akumcham, the place where Babatu's wife was chained until she died*

Picture by Ademin Amos

This great victory brought overwhelming joy to the people of Sandema and the surrounding villages in Builsa land such as Bachonsa, Chuchuliga, Doninga, Fumbis, Gbedema, Kadema, Kanjaga, Siniensi, and Wiaga who believed that they were saved by joining forces with Sandema warriors because if they were to be defeated, their children, mothers, fathers, babies, husbands, and wives would have been captured into slavery thereby ending the future of their villages.⁶⁴

After the defeat of Samori and Babatu by the Builsa people, the slaves who were captured and under the custody of the raiders were freed and liberated by the Builsa people. The

⁶⁴PRAAD, Accra, ADM56/1/169, Kanjarga Native Affairs 1913; Azong, A.. Landlord Abiliyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 03 August, 2015; Adaambik, C. War dancer (Feok Festival) Abiliyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 06 August, 2015.

Builsa people gave the freed slaves the opportunity to go, especially those who could trace back their homes or where they came from; those who were willing to stay, especially those who were seriously injured and needed treatment, were assured of assistance and free land to start a comfortable life. Above all, the freed slaves were offered protection from being captured again and they were given equal treatment as good citizens of Builsa land. Today, because of that long period of intermarriage and integration into the Builsa communities, it has become difficult to identify people with slavery background and because of the sensitive nature of the story of slavery; people prefer not to talk about it as it may lead to confusion, hatred and acrimony in the communities.⁶⁵

Initially, the Builsa people did not organize any public event to commemorate their victory over Samory and Babatu because the Feok festival was celebrated separately from the war dance. The war dance was performed when the chief and the people received a very important dignitary to show their bravery. In 1972, the paramount chief of Sandema, Nab Ayieta Azangtilow brought the two events together as the Feok festival to be celebrated every year in the third week of December.⁶⁶

Every year, the Builsa Traditional area celebrates the Feok festival as a re-enactment of their victory and encounter with the slave raiders. The preparation and the celebration of the war dance takes two weeks; the first week is normally used to consult the deities and

⁶⁵ Amoak, A. Elder, Sandema Nab Palace. Interviewed, 10 August, 2015; Abakisi, A. Family head Abakisiyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 15 August, 2015.

⁶⁶ Nab Azagsuk. The Paramount Chief of Builsa. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015; Akatuk, A. Clan head Tankunsah Sandema. Interviewed, 17 August, 2015; Akingkan, A. Clan head Fumbisi. Interviewed, 31 August, 2015.

the ancestors of Builsa land by way of performing rituals or sacrificing animals, food and drinks to them, formally informing them of the commencement of the festival and the role they need to play to secure the earth and the heavens from spiritual attacks and confrontations in order to ensure a successful celebration.⁶⁷

One important aspect of the war dance is that participants do not speak during the display; it tells the level of concentration and seriousness. The paraphernalia or armour that war dancers wear during the festival is made of a smock containing amulets, charms and talisman that protects and deflects bullets and evil spirits from the individual. They also carry with them a pack of poisoned arrows and bows, and special axes. The dancers also carry all kinds of animal skins and the parts of animals obtained from hunting and the headgear or helmet made from the horns of wild buffalos portrays their bravery as hunters.⁶⁸

The dance movement displayed during the war dance depicts the movement of a wild buffalo that is poised for action with the head a bit lowered and well-focused. The dance movement coupled with their facial expressions reveals all the seriousness and determination attached to defending their lives and territory.⁶⁹

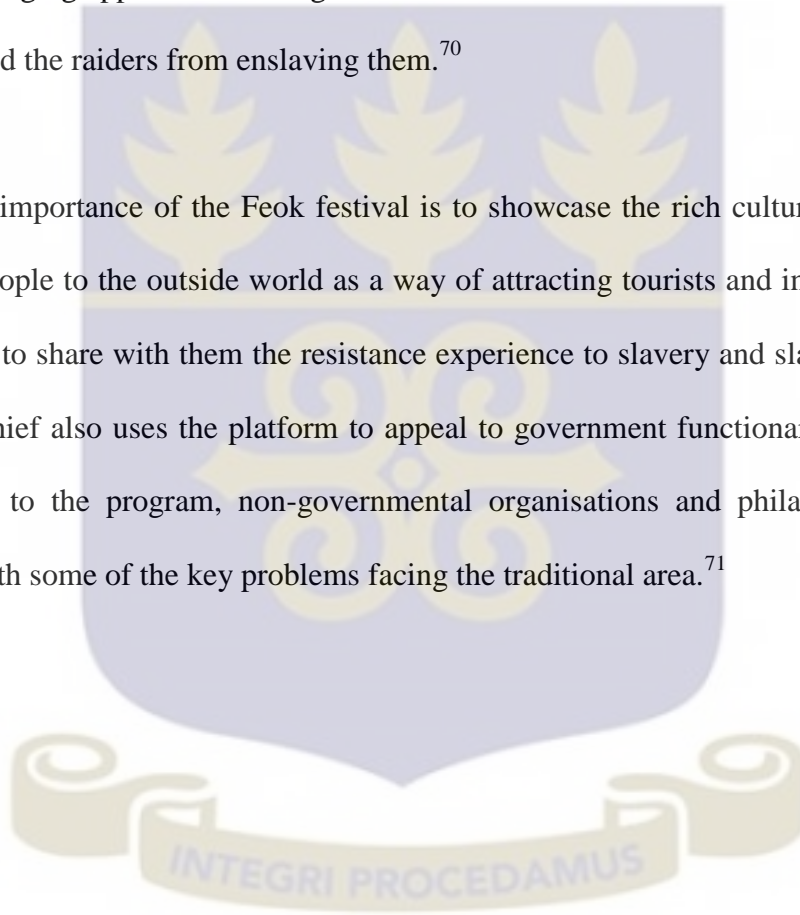
⁶⁷ Anankan, A. Chief Priest Fiisa Shrine Sandema. Interviewed, 05 September, 2015; Nab Azagsuk. The Paramount Chief of Builsa. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015; Amosah, A. Elder Fiisa Sandema/War Dancer (Feok Festival). Interviewed, 05 September, 2015.

⁶⁸ Avaripo, A. War dancer (Feok Festival) Nyasah Sandema. Interviewed, 02 September, 2015; Aguboro, A. War dancer (Feok Festival) Nayeri Sandema. Interviewed, 06 August, 2015.

⁶⁹ Adaambik, C. War Dancer (Feok Festival) Abiliyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 06 August, 2015; Anyana, B. Clan head Asangyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 15 August, 2015.

Women have also contributed in diverse ways in the celebration of the festival, though they did not participate in the war against the raiders; but when the festival became a public event in 1972 with the incorporation of the war dance into the Feok, women have shown their zeal and enthusiasm by way of moving closely to the war dancers during performance by occasionally fanning and wiping their sweats with towels and their clothes and singing appellations to urge them on as brave men of Builsa land who fought and conquered the raiders from enslaving them.⁷⁰

Some of the importance of the Feok festival is to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Builsa people to the outside world as a way of attracting tourists and investors to the area in order to share with them the resistance experience to slavery and slave trade. The paramount chief also uses the platform to appeal to government functionaries who have been invited to the program, non-governmental organisations and philanthropists for assistance with some of the key problems facing the traditional area.⁷¹



⁷⁰ Abil, A. Elder, Sandema Nab Palace. Interviewed, 20 August, 2015; Ajuik, T. Family head Kalijiisah Sandema. Interviewed, 28 August, 2015.

⁷¹ Nab Azagsuk. The Paramount Chief of Builsa. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015; Azong, A. Landlord Azongyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 03 August, 2015.



Plate 11: *A woman fanning and urging the war dancers on*
Picture by Monica Tetzlaff



Plate 12: Performers of the war dance in full paraphernalia in Sandema during the Feok festival

Monica Tetzlaff



Plate 13: *War dancers in the Feok Festival*

Picture by Monica Tetzlaff



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The story of slave resistance has hardly been told, even though the physical and material evidence used in the resistance experience point to this. Literature available on the subject is little in Ghana though a lot has been written about resistance in the Americas, the middle passage and along the coast of East and Central Africa where Europeans were physically present. However, the resistance story in Northern Ghana where most of the slaves were taken has eluded the attention of many scholars.⁷²

The defence walls at Gwollu remind us of the application of technology to local materials for the construction of the walls to protect the people against slavers, while the people of Sankana relied on the opportunities provided by the environment to resist slavery and slave trade.⁷³

The Builsas also resisted slavery; their territory experienced continuous attacks by raiders. The very motivation for raiding was the centrality of Sandema. It was well connected commercially with trade routes linking it north, south, east and west. It was geographically important as it also had portions that had water which made it a good camp site for raiders who could have access to water for themselves, their captured slaves and their animals.⁷⁴

⁷² Kankpeyeng, B. W. *The Slave Trade in Northern Ghana: Landmarks, Legacies and Connections*. Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies 2009, University of Ghana. pp.210-218.

⁷³ Agyemang, "Where There Is No Silence" p. 48.

⁷⁴ Holden, J. J. "The Zabarima Conquest" p.67.

Politically, Sandema was also the paramount among the rest of the chiefdoms which meant capturing Sandema could make it easy to raid the rest of the communities. Incidentally, these very factors which made Sandema and the Builsa area prone to raids also became the very factors that ensured victory over raiders.⁷⁵

The Sandema chief, Nab Anankum, used his position to organise the rest of the communities for war. The war was fought within a day and in the end, the Builsas gained victory over the raiders. What ensured the victory included the strategic geographical location, unity among the people and the use of good weapons. Geographically, the terrain was marshy, which rendered horses ineffective; unity of the people ensured a formidable force, and finally, weapons such as poisoned arrows and axes ensured the quick death of the raiders.⁷⁶

The Builsa people have carved out their own history in relation to their victory over the slave raiders who possessed superior firepower as against the inferior weapons by the Builsa people who decided to face the raiders squarely. This would be a story that will be told till the end of time. In preserving the story, it has become part of the Feok festival which is enacted every year; this is to keep the resistance experience alive in the minds of people. Other important sites associated with slavery include the Abuga valley, Akumcham and the Fiisa shrine where materials and weapons during the war were collected and kept. Efforts should be made by the District Assembly to make such sites

⁷⁵ Nab Azagsuk, The Paramount Chief of Builsa. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015.

⁷⁶ Avaripo, A. War Dancer(Feok Festival) Nyasah Sandema. Interviewed, 02 September, 2015.

more attractive to tourists without waiting for external support because it is the history and identity of the people.⁷⁷

Numerous sites in Northern Ghana, are associated with slavery and they carry meaning in the present day, both locally and for the diasporan Africans, and have equal potential to enhance our understanding of slavery and its legacy.⁷⁸



⁷⁷ Nab Azagsuk. Paramount Chief of Builsa. Interviewed, 04 August, 2015; Chief Priest; Aduok, A. Elder Abiliyeri Sandema. Interviewed, 24 August, 2015.

⁷⁸ Agyemang, "Where There Is No Silence" p.52.

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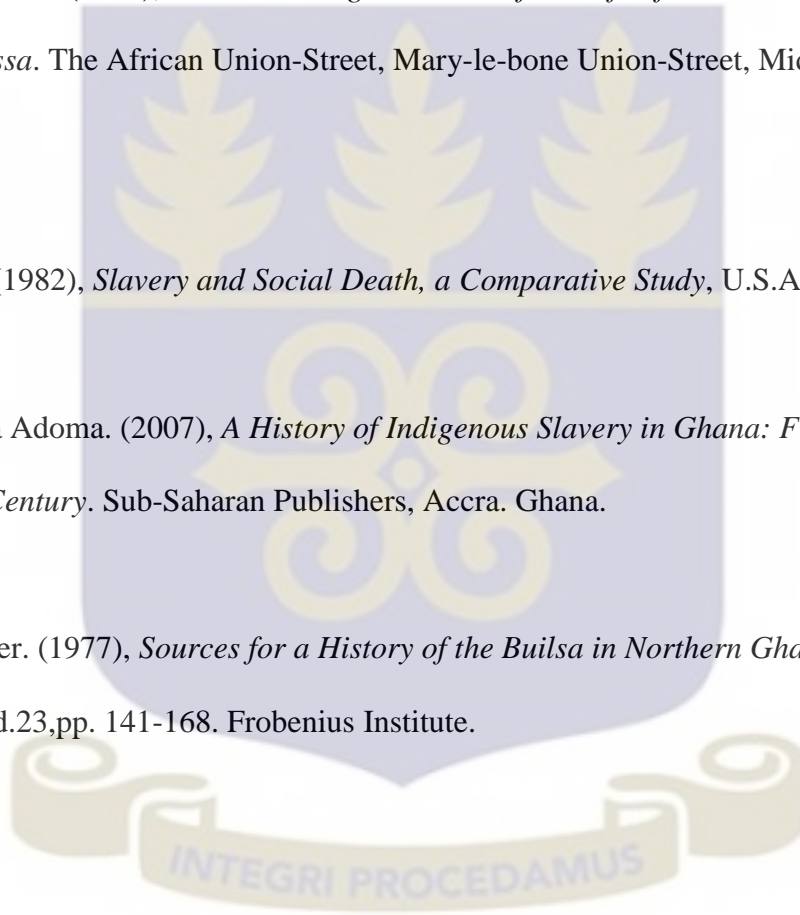


TABLE OF INFORMANTS

NAME	AGE	TITLE	INTERVIEW DATE	PLACE
Abakisi, A.	84	Family Head	15/08/2015	Abakisiyeri
Abil, A	68	Elder	20/08/2015	Abiliyeri
Adambik, C.	58	War Dancer	06/08/2015	Abiliyeri
Aduok, A.	62	Elder	24/08/2015	Abiliyeri
Afobrikami, J.	64	Landlord	08/09/2015	Chuchuliga
Aguboro, A.	61	War Dancer	06/08/2015	Nayeri
Ajuik, T.	71	Family Head	28/08/2015	Kalijiisah
Akanglang, A.	99	Landlord	31/08/2015	Fumbisi
Akanwandami	100	Clan Head	05/08/2015	Abiliyeri
Akatuk, A.	79	Clan Head	17/08/2015	Tankunsah
Akingkan, A.	71	Clan Head	31/08/2015	Fumbisi
Alafiisa, A.I.	73	Retired Police officer	25/08/2015	Fiisa
Amoak, A.	65	Elder	10/08/2015	Nayeri
Anyana, B.	69	Head Clan	15/08/2015	Asangyeri
Avaripo, A.	67	War Dancer	02/09/2015	Nyasah
Azong, A.	46	Landlord	03/08/2015	Abiliyeri
Nab Azagsuk, A.A.		Paramount Chief of the Builsa Traditional Area	04/08/2015	Sandema

GROUP INTERVIEW, 5TH SEPTEMBER, 2015**CARETAKERS OF THE FIISA SHRINE**

NAME	AGE	TITLE
Adaawen, A.	61	Family Head / war dancer
Adanzuma, A.	28	Family Member
Akanyaba, A.	64	Family Head
Amosah, A.	40	Elder / war dancer
Anankan, A.	85	Chief Priest Of The Fiisa Shrine
Anankanbiik, A.	31	Family Member
Anuribiik, A.	37	Family Member

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